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McCRACKEN BACK ON TRACK IN GRADE III, \$100,000 MATT WINN AT CHURCHILL DOWNS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, June 17, 2017) – Fresh off a disappointing eighth-place finish in the \$2 million Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (Grade I), **Whitham Thoroughbreds LLC**'s multiple stakes-winning homebred colt **McCracken** overcame an awkward start to comfortably win Saturday night's 20th running of the \$100,000 Matt Winn (Grade III) at Churchill Downs by 2 ¼ lengths.

Ridden by **Brian Hernandez Jr.** and trained by **Ian Wilkes**, McCracken returned to the winner's circle by running 1 1/16 miles on a fast track in 1:42.84.

This marked the third time that Wilkes has won the Matt Winn. He also won the race in 2012 with **Neck 'n Neck** and the 2015 renewal with **Island Town**.

McCracken, breaking from post 2 in the field of six 3-year-olds, lost his footing when the gates sprung open, which allowed the colt to settle about 9 ½ lengths behind early leader **Aquamarine**, who led the cast through a first quarter mile in :23.58 and the half mile in :47.48. McCracken made a bold four-wide move on the far turn, drew even with leaders **Aquamarine**, **Mo's Mojo** and **Colonelsdarktemper** and spurted clear at the sixteenth pole to beat the latter.

The victory was worth \$61,380 and boosted McCracken's bankroll to \$472,228 with a record of 7-5-0-1. The Matt Winn was McCracken's fourth stakes win. He emerged from the May 6 Derby with cut on his left hind leg that likely occurred during a bumping incident shortly after the start of the 1 ¼-mile Classic, won by **Always Dreaming**.

The bay colt was the Derby's 6-1 third betting choice following a pair of graded stakes wins on the Road to the Kentucky Derby. He followed a Street Sense Overnight Stakes win at Churchill Downs last fall with victories in the Kentucky Jockey Club (GII), also at Churchill Downs, and Sam F. Davis (GIII) at Tampa Bay before finishing third in Keeneland's Blue Grass (GII) prior to the Derby.

McCracken, who carried 123 pounds which was five pounds more than his rivals, returned \$2.40, \$2.10 and \$2.10 as the odds-on 1-5 favorite. **Colonelsdarktemper**, ridden by **Jon Court**, returned \$4.60 and \$3.60 and finished three-quarters of a length in front of **Society Beau** who paid \$3.20 to show under **Robby Albarado**.

It was another half-length back to **Mo's Mojo** in fourth with **Excitations** and **Aquamarine** completing the order of finish.

McCracken is a Kentucky-bred son of Ghostzapper out of the Seeking the Gold mare Ivory Empress. He was bred by his owner **Janis Whitham**.

The Matt Winn, which honors the famed Churchill Downs president and general manager that served as the driving force in the development of Churchill Downs and Kentucky Derby, will go as Race 5 on Saturday at approximately 8:03 p.m. (all times Eastern). Winn will be elected into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame as a "Pillar of the Turf" on Aug. 4.

MATT WINN QUOTES

BRIAN HERNANDEZ JR., jockey of McCracken (winner): "Today, he was kind of back to his old self where he got into a nice rhythm around there. He wasn't wanting to overdo it the first part and then he just kind of built his confidence up as he went. ... He went on by those horses pretty easily and thought he kind of did it the right way. You always hear it, but it was actually the perfect race that you're looking for for a horse coming back."

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IAN WILKES, trainer of McCRAKEN (winner): "I loved that he relaxed (at the start, like he did early in his career). ... He left there listening to Brian, doing things the right way.

"I didn't give Brian any instructions. I just told him when I legged him up, 'you know him. You ride him. Ride with some confidence.'

"I loved everything about it. He come into the paddock really good today. Behind the gates, he was walking around like he had some confidence about him. And so that was good. And then when he left the gate, he just dropped the bit and listened to Brian. I was very pleased.

(Hasn't thought about next race): "It's just a shew, I got through this. Any time you're 1-5, you're supposed to win. These are the hardest to win."

JON COURT, jockey of COLONELSDARKTEMPER (second): "My horse fought on very well. Once we got passed by McCracken he sort of tried to quit on me but I roused him pretty well and he held second which was great."

JINX FIRES, trainer of COLONELSDARKTEMPER (second): "We knew going into the race it would be tough to beat McCracken. Jon (Court) gave him a great trip and I'm proud with how he ran."

NEIL HOWARD, trainer of SOCIETY BEAU (third): "I thought he made a great middle move. If the distance was probably a little bit further I think we could've ran second but I'm happy with how he ran."

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